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## THE RELATION OF THE RETURNED STUDENTS TO THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

*By Y. S. Tsao, Secretary of the Chinese Students' Alliance in  
America*

It is not without a considerable amount of misgiving that the writer ventures to trace the relation between the returned students and the recent revolution, as his residence in America might lead him into partial statements in favor of the returned students from this country or the underestimation of the rôle played by those from Europe or Japan. Moreover the topic called for specific treatment to the exclusion of generalizations, so it is the aim of this paper to study the returned students from a subjective standpoint at the outset, to be followed by concrete and typical illustrations of the part played by the returned students from the several countries.

It might be well, at the beginning, to divide the returned students into two main groups, namely those from Europe and America and those from Japan. It must be admitted that by far the largest part of the recent revolution, was accomplished by the returned students from Japan by virtue of their numerical strength and for other reasons to be accounted for later on. On the whole, all the returned students, wherever they hail from and whatever political views they hold are destined to play the part of leaders on account of their superior training and breadth of vision. It has been estimated that America has 5 per cent college men and they will eventually become the leaders of the nation for even if they do not all become men of great influence, they will always be looked up to in every community as leaders of public opinion for the same reasons. Only in the case of the Chinese students they have better opportunities of duplicating themselves in this rapid transitory period of China's history.

INFLUENCE OF WESTERN EDUCATION FOR REFORMATION  
AND REVOLUTION

A recent writer has observed pithily that if you change the ideas of the Chinese their policy will change, which is no more and no less than granting our people with the credit for being rational. Of the many factors leading to the modification or reversal of ideas the influence of western education has achieved the most far-reaching results. The contrast between the social, economic, political and religious institutions of the West and those of the East is too obvious to escape the attention of even the most unobserving student. While much of the good in the old institutions should be conserved, every student cannot but desire to see the adoption of many modern ideas that have been slowly developed in the west. This is strictly true to the students who have left China for a stay of from five to eight years of study in a foreign land during the formative period of their lives. The experience of living in a different atmosphere is interesting and the impression correspondingly deep. In a word, they form a bridge across the broad expanse of seas, on which new learning, new ideals and new institutions are constantly conveyed to China. Fully saturated with new ideas and ideals, filled with the zeal of new ambitions and aspirations and kindled by a new sense of patriotism as a result of travel, these liberated individuals return to do and dare. From this very spirit the seed of revolution is bound to germinate. In the early seventies, some one hundred and twenty students were brought over to America by Dr. Yung Wing of Yale for a course of twelve years' training but they were recalled in 1881 being accused for harbouring revolutionary ambitions. The apprehensive Manchu government was not far from the truth.

Another important factor which helped immensely to develop the revolutionary spirit was the recent political history of China, both nationally and internationally. Ever since the China-Japan war, the country has been in a state of unrest. The reverses of that war caused a rude awakening and the late Emperor Kwang-Hsu with the assistance of

the reform party headed by Kwang Yu Wei and Liang Chi Chao decreed such a series of ultra-radical reforms that it soon resulted in the famous coup d'état. This reaction blindly led to the painful experience of 1900 but when the Manchurian leaders of the Boxers were banished from the court, the pendulum began to sweep back and the cause of reform again developed a brighter prospect. The late Empress Dowager was convinced of the necessity of reform and she had the direction of Yuan Shih Kai who as the Viceroy of Chili carried out a very successful series of reform measures. However, the pendulum reached the limit at the deaths of the Empress Dowager and the Emperor when Yuan Shih Kai and Tuan Fang, the two most promising statesmen of the day, fell. Since then, the retrogression was rapid. The people agitated for an immediate parliament but the government resisted the demand stubbornly. With this public disappointment, with the vacillating and insincere policy of the government, with the ever present economic factor of industrial revolution and non-employment, plague, famine and financial stringency, all the symptoms of a revolution were present. Added to all these, internationally, there were the constant acts of aggression in the form of wanton grabbing of territory and provoked and unprovoked military demonstrations on our frontiers. So since 1910, the bubbling cauldron of discontent and impatience was ready to boil over at any moment. Under such conditions, the returned students as representatives of advanced thought could not but ascribe such consequences to the existing political corruptions and diplomatic blunders and wishing sincerely for a better state of affairs, not a few of them raised the cry, "On to Peking!"

When the students returned from America in the early eighties, they were despised, suspected and watched by the officers of the Manchu government. For the first few years, they were given a thorough drilling in Chinese literature so as to win them over to the conservative attitude of looking at things and when sufficiently purged of their revolutionary ideas, they were left to shift for themselves for the government had no use for such "semi-foreigners." But

beginning with the reformation after the China-Japan war, a number of reformers from the old school went to court as advisers and not a few returned students from America were given appointments by high officials. However, it was not until after the Boxer uprising that a number of them through the recommendation of Yuan Shih Kai were given responsible positions in the government. Among them were the ex-secretary of state, Liang Tung Yen, the ex-premier, Tang Shao Yi, Admiral San Chen Ping, ex-minister Wu Ting Fang, Sir Liang Cheng, Railroad Director Liang Mun Ting, Chief Engineer Jeme Tien Yu, etc.

The prospect of a successful reformation was quite evident while Yuan Shih Kai remained in power with the students giving suggestions and rendering very creditable service. Modern systems of police, of popular education, of judiciary and army were organized; railway management was systematized, foreign relations improved and a constitution recommended. Several military maneuvers were held and foreign critics were actually discussing the ever-recurrent bug-bear of "Yellow-Peril." This state of affairs was too good for the Manchus for they could not follow the course of development intelligently, so ere long "the strong man of China" was degraded and with him a number of pains-taking returned students. Once placed in responsible positions, they saw the hopeless way the insincere government had been hood-winking the whole nation and at once entertained revolutionary ideas to upset the whole government and build a new structure in its place.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION

The abolition of the old imperial literary examinations was succeeded by the new educational system based upon the Japanese and American institutions. It emphasized a liberal scientific education. When the many forms of schools sprang up throughout the nation like mushrooms, there was a great dearth of modern teachers. For a time the scholars of the old school attempted to supply the demand but as the curriculum was so up-to-date, they found the

desires of the students to be above their ability to satisfy. Indeed, many of these teachers devoured all forms of modern text-books and translated literature so that for the primary and middle grades they taught with fair success, but the more advanced students became uncontrollable which accounted for the innumerable strikes and lock-outs. This unsatisfactory state of affairs together with the recent successes of Japan in her war with Russia, induced the government to send thousands of students to Japan. At one time, the exodus reached 15,000 and Japan had to open special institutions to accommodate them.

In the meantime, the government demanded more up-to-date officials and following the traditional method of testing them, competitive examinations were held for the returned students. The successful candidates were conferred the same honorary degrees according to the old nomenclature of "Hanlin" (doctor of philosophy), "Chin-shih" and "Juren." This recognition of the returned students on the part of the government increased their influence and prestige throughout the whole educational world. While large numbers of the students in schools aspired to be educated abroad, the greater part had to be satisfied by being taught by the returned students whose direct influence upon this new student class proved to be a very potent factor for the revolution.

While the handful of returned students from Europe and America were busy occupying themselves with official life, teaching and engineering, a few of them translated the works of John Stuart Mill, Huxley, Spencer, Darwin, Henry George and other modern writers. "The doctrine of the survival of the fittest has been on the lips of every thinking Chinese, and its grim significance is not lost on a nation that seems to be the center of struggle in the Far East." However, the greater part of the modern ideas came from Japan through the students there who after a few months of training could easily transcribe Japanese translations of western books into Chinese. The rapid multiplication of patriotic newspapers and magazines helped immensely to disseminate modern political ideas along with scientific knowledge

throughout the length and breadth of the nation. The biographies of such statesmen as Washington, Bismark, Metternich and Gladstone, such leaders as Napoleon, Cromwell and Lincoln, such patriots as Mazzini, Garibaldi were literally devoured. The doctrines of Rousseau, Montesquieu and Voltaire were expounded and a weekly known as *The People* based upon the principles of "Young Italy" was started. It had a circulation of 150,000 before it was finally suppressed by the Japanese government upon the request of the Manchu government.

The publication of radical papers and magazines liberated the individuals and inspired a new national feeling. Patriotism developed a new significance and nationalism bred impatience and self-assertion. Constitutionalism and republicanism were keenly discussed. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity was the slogan of the day. According to a Japanese writer, "Every mother's son of the returned students from Japan is a cheerful, reckless, vociferous, flaming torch for the revolutionary movement."

Intense patriotism and the realization of political dangers at once reversed the old adage of "Good iron is not used for making nails and good men are not meant for the soldiery." Many students joined military institutions at home and several hundreds of them went to Japan and Germany for such training of their own accord and often against their parent's wishes. Many of them were supported by the Manchu government and it was the insincerity of which finally turned them against it and destroyed it.

With the revolutionary spirit in the atmosphere, the earlier reformers and revolutionaries saw their opportunities. There existed at least, three distinct parties. The first aimed to preserve the Empire which meant the restoration of Emperor Kwang Hsu's reform program; the second desired to see the early adoption of the constitutional government; and the third had their object in the overthrow of the alien dynasty. The leaders of the first two parties, Kang Yu Wei and Liang Chi Chiao obtained some funds and support from the Chinese settlers abroad but it was Dr. Sun Yat Sen who as the leader of the republican movement



captivated a large number of students in Japan by the organization of the "Tung Men Hwei."

The aim of the said "Tung Men Hwei" society was to alienate the feelings of the people and to stir up a revolution against the Manchu government. The weekly called *The People* was published by them which contained articles depicting the corruption, tyranny and impotence of the Manchus. It was a short-lived paper for the Japanese government, seeking to strengthen her friendship with China, suppressed it. Another department of the "Tung Men Hwei" was called the "Kung Ching" which undertook to send agents to the various provinces of China to convert the officers and soldiers to become revolutionaries, while others were sent to the Chinese settlements to raise funds for the same cause. They also manufactured bombs and threatened to kill those soldiers who refused to join them. Among these, Hwang Shing, Liu King and Sun Wu were the greatest leaders. In Europe and America, there were no special organizations of that character. Quite a few, however, were members of the "Tung Men Hwei."

In Europe, a revolutionary publication called *Le Nouveau Siècle* was published at Paris, but no secret organization was known to exist.

#### PRELIMINARY PLOTS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF STUDENTS

Previous to the revolution of October 11, 1911, several preliminary plots were attempted under returned student leadership. The earliest one on record was in 1900, directly after the Boxer uprising, when Dr. Yung Wing was elected president of a secret organization at Shanghai, consisting of leading officials, merchants and students who were exasperated at the most stupid political blunder of the Manchu government in making use of patriotic fanaticism as a means of stemming the onslaught of western nations. This plot was soon detected and ever after Dr. Yung Wing lived an exile at Hartford, Connecticut until his death last year.

In 1907, there was a plot at Ping Shang in Anhui Province; in 1909, the Governor of Anhui was assassinated at An



King; in 1910 a plot was unearthed at Canton. Many returned students and bright young men sacrificed their lives in these attempts; but repeated failure only helped to arouse the public sentiment of the people and contributed to popularise revolutionary actions.

It was generally admitted, however, that the Szechuan riot had no other signification than a movement against the nationalization of railways and that of Changsha was a protest against the rice monopoly. No one has been able to ascertain the object of the bomb thrown at the five commissioners when they started from Peking to investigate into the constitutional governments of the world. The fear that the adoption of a constitution by the Manchu government might defeat the cause of the anti-Manchu movement has been considered as the most plausible interpretation. There is no necessity for us to analyze all these preliminary plots. Suffice it to say, the ramifications of the secret societies were rapidly being extended throughout the country.

The leaders of the revolution intended to start it simultaneously in eight provinces, four months later than the actual date of the outbreak. The *modus operandi* and the personnel were fully prepared; proclamations for the public and badges for adherents were made; secret parties were traveling about winning sympathizers and supporters. General Hwang Shing at Hankow, General Wu Loh-tsun of the Northern Army, Liu King and Sun Wu at Wuchang and Chen Ki Mei at Shanghai were the chief leaders from Japan. General Li Yuan Hung from Japan played the most important part, but he was forced to join by the soldiery.

Very few students from Europe and America were members of the "Tung Men Hwei," and judging from their actions only Mr. C. T. Wang, Drs. Chen Hui Wang and Chintao Chen from Yale were the only possible ones, while the rest were taken by surprise.

Not counting Dr. Sun Yat Sen, Dr. Wu Ting Fang was the first returned student from England or America who joined the revolutionary cause at a critical moment, and he was supported in the revolutionary camp by many returned

students from Europe and America. Some of them joined the Red Cross Society as M. D. T. Yu of Harvard and Yang Paoling of Purdue, while twenty of them returned from America to take an active part in fighting. For example, T. S. Ma of Columbia and E. M. Ho of Chicago University.

In passing, we must not fail to mention how the success of the revolution was in a great measure due to the sympathy of foreign nations. Judging from past experiences, uprisings in China were always associated in the minds of men with imminent danger to foreign lives and property; but during the last revolution, foreigners were most scrupulously protected, which fact won for the revolutionists, the confidence of the world, as it was clear evidence of intelligent leadership and superior organization.

It will be in order, perhaps, to give a comparative estimate of the parts played by the two groups of students showing why those from Japan were more energetic and revolutionary. The charge has been made against the returned students from Europe and America of being materialistic and self-seeking, and this charge has been repeated by some of the students themselves. Why more students in America did not join in the revolutionary movement before the revolution? The answer, I believe, is better made by presenting the causes and circumstances which made the students in Japan so radically revolutionary.

First of all, the chief cause was the environment. With some 15,000 students located in the few educational centers of Japan; with a steady stream of political news from China; with numerous organizations for discussion, with lively topics furnished by the revolutionary organs as the magazine—*The New People*—published by Liang Chi Chiao and *The People* by the “Tung Men Hwei,” the revolutionary spirit was carefully nurtured. Moreover, the Chinese students could master the Japanese language in a few months, and as the curriculum was elementary, it was not too difficult for them. So that much of their time was spent discussing political questions and transcribing such views into Chinese for publication at home. Furthermore, this grouping together of a large body of young men with similar political

views made them feel the power of union, as the mob psychologist would say. That is why in California, Hawaii, Singapore and Java the like spirit is seen.

Secondly: they were mostly older students of the old school and well versed in Chinese literature. The Japanese curriculum offers courses on modern Chinese history, giving the details of the Manchurian conquest which would naturally tend to stir up anti-dynastic feelings. Moreover, the Japanese friends of China who still reverence the past history of China did advise, time and again, for the restoration of the government to the Chinese proper. During the time of the Boxer uprising, quite a number of Japanese writers counseled for the assassination of the imperial family while fleeing to Shensi. Besides, undoubtedly the ultra-radical propensities and the military atmosphere of Japan exerted a great influence upon the temperament of these earnest students. So likewise, the liberal atmosphere of France instilled revolutionary ideas and military Germany gave a martial spirit to students studying in those two countries.

Lastly: Japan's high-handed actions in Korea and Manchuria together with the general attitude of the Japanese towards the Chinese, stirred their blood to boiling point, while a study of Japan's recent history, dates their modern era of progress to the restoration of the Meiji House. Hence, their logical deduction led them to pin their faith upon a revolution for a new China. By tracing the transition of medieval Japan into modern Japan they could almost map out step by step the course China should take; but the first step according to their conception, was a change of government. Besides, a large number of them were poor and had to undergo a great deal of hardship and privation. Loving their fatherland strongly, desiring to save her from a great national calamity and having nothing to lose personally, they became a vociferous, destructive and desperately revolutionary body of men.

On the other hand, in Europe and America, the handful of students was scattered over large areas; news from home was scanty with long intervals between; the difficulties with the language and the exacting curriculum occupied much of

their time; there were no revolutionary organizations or organs to furnish exciting topics for discussion. When authentic news arrived, it was about a month old and later developments might have already changed the situation, with the result that students could only speculate as to the outcome. That was why the students in Japan sent far more telegrams to the Government advising certain courses of action on great political issues than did the students in Europe and America.

In the second place, most of the students here are younger and the technical courses taken by a large number of them in engineering, agriculture and other professional studies, are not conducive to revolutionary conceptions. The wide difference in languages and comparatively poorer scholarship in Chinese literature, make it impossible to transcribe any of our new ideas readily into Chinese for publication in China. Then, the local political conditions pursue an even tenor, the commercial spirit is transcendent, and the constructive element is based upon educational, social and religious reformation.

No professors or friends were sufficiently versed in Chinese literature and history to advise a revolution which might endanger the lives and property of all their missionary friends and other foreign residents in China. The Christian influence and missionary interest point to a goal of evolutionary development and Christian service to our country. Under such circumstances, in our more liberal students there has been built a broader and deeper personality adapted for slower constructive work.

In the last place, the cold reception of the earlier returned students given by the government and people at home, does not lead us to expect any large following upon our immediate return as any revolutionary course of action would necessitate. We would have to vindicate ourselves by deeds and action that we are not semi-foreigners but as sincerely and deeply interested in the welfare of our country and people as any others who are loud in denunciation and quick in popularising the knowledge acquired. Besides of the 800 students in America and the 400 in Europe, 250 here and

about 200 on the other side are government students and sons of influential officials who would not desire to be left stranded in distant lands by premature iconoclastic expressions which would not materially help the cause. They had too much to lose and little to gain. Quite a large percentage of them, approximately 50 per cent, received their earlier training in missionary schools and their views have been tempered by the element of service which could be performed under any circumstances. Moreover, the contrast seen between the conditions in the west and those of China is greater than that between Japan and China; consequently the problems they aim to solve are deeper rooted, and a change of government—desirable if it could be accomplished without endangering too much the status quo, is not the *sine qua non* for the modernization of China. That is why the students in the west would have liked to see a constitutional government through a peaceful reformation rather than a republic via a revolution.

Nevertheless, while the greater part of the destructive work was done by the larger body of students from Japan, as soon as the students from Europe and America saw the desperate situation, they all heartily joined the cause, for they saw the die was cast, the Rubicon was crossed, and no alternative was possible. Some twenty-five students returned from America and about the same number went from Europe, while Japan emptied her whole consignment into the cauldron. The students in America declared themselves for the Republic through the columns of *The Chinese Students' Monthly*, the official organ of the Students' Alliance in February of 1912 in an announcement which read in part as follows:

It might seem as if the student body here has not declared its interest in the political controversy of vast consequences early enough, but that evidently has been due to the lack of first hand information, the deliberate nature of our students, the indefiniteness of the revolutionary leaders, and more especially the one-sided statements of the newspapers in this country. However, our sympathy has always been with the revolutionaries, for they represent the progressive cause that will ultimately render it possible for China to come to her own. In the meantime, the provisional

republican government has been established and news from our fellow students, brothers and friends who are in the midst of the struggle, elucidate the actual conditions in China. Knowing them, we publicly announce the definite stand that the students are willing to make for the republic, the establishment of which will go down into history as the greatest event of the twentieth century—the political emancipation of 400,000,000 souls.

New occasions teach new duties,  
Time makes ancient good uncouth,  
They must UPWARD still and ONWARD,  
Who would keep abreast of TRUTH.

—*Lowell.*

Again, it was estimated that no less than 75 per cent of the provisional Republican Cabinet of Dr. Sun consisted of returned students from Europe and America, while even the coalition provisional cabinet of President Yuan Shih Kai had 50 per cent of them with Tang Shao Yi as the first premier.

To say that returned students from America and Europe would not entertain revolutionary ideas on account of materialistic and selfish ambitions would be a charge too extravagant and the contention would fall by its own weight of exaggeration. For did not Dr. Yung Wing, the first student graduated in America, stake his whole life in a revolutionary attempt after four great constructive institutions, namely, the Kiangnan Arsenal, the China Merchants' Steamship Navigation Company, the National Telegraph System and the Educational Mission of the seventies. It was indeed an inspiring experience when the speaker called on this "Father of Modern Education in China" to discuss for two hours upon the comprehensive plan he was laying for the educational, industrial and military reorganization of China, when he was invited by his friend, Dr. Sun Yat Sen to give his advice after the establishment of the republic.

The ideal returned student from America is therefore not a destructive but a constructive man, and it was only when repeatedly defeated that he will adopt destructive measures as proved by Dr. Yung Wing and Dr. Sun Yat Sen, both of whom received the American and European influence of living a broader and deeper life. Nevertheless, we must give all credit to our fellow students from Japan from their intense

enthusiasm and patriotism and to the many earnest reformers among the people at home that gave such an impetus to the Revolution from the very start.

#### THE TASK OF RECONSTRUCTION

A cowl does not make a monk and the name alone cannot transform China into a real republic. Reality and not idealism is the sure basis of a modern state. Rabid emotion has played its part, and a mighty important part, in stirring up enthusiasm and devotion, but any continued indulgence in it, would sweep an individual or a community off its own feet, as history has proved time and again. China is no exception, and as the republic is established, it is time that enthusiasm should be superseded by discerning foresight and cool judgement, so that a strong, prosperous and centralized republic might be insured for the generations to come, as the problems yet to be surmounted are stupendous.

During the revolution, the public sentiment in China demanded the adoption of the American government as the model and since the number of students in Japan is rapidly diminishing and as more students are coming to America, the responsibility resting upon their shoulders to develop China along republican ideals is consequently increased. If they are true to their training as was Dr. Yung Wing, the first student, then "there is also a hope and promise that God means to build up in that land some strong, free and characteristic manhood which shall help the world to its completeness."